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WAR AND THE CHRISTIAN ETHIC.

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THE tendency of civilization, in its development, to approximate, gradually but surely, more closely to the Christian ethic, promising ultimately to become one with it, especially in what relates to measures of violence among nations and men, is becoming more and more obvious to thoughtful minds. And this, in spite of what seems contradiction in the terrible tragedy of the present war; for, after all, that is only giving sharp and telling emphasis to the fact stated, which in turn corresponds with the highest hopes of the best in humanity. As a consequence, it is not surprising that, in the discussion of the great conflict in Europe—discussed from almost every possible angle, as it has been—no point of view surpasses in interest that which seeks to determine its relation to the ethic of Christ. Already there has been a decided awakening of the religious conscience, even among vast numbers of people who hitherto have made light of religious profession. It is, therefore, a matter of first importance that we should rightly understand the content of the ethics of non-resistance, if we are to be saved from a confusion which grows out of hurried and emotional thinking in an age that demands, as the first essential in all things, quickness of action.

Then we are compelled to reflect, singular though it be, that not only does emotion play so often too great a part in religious thinking, but that there is a deeply rooted conviction in the public mind that the great paradox of Christian teaching, as to conduct, is capable of instant simple interpretation by some inherent automatic power of mentality that resides in every individual. In the reaction against the theologian and his bewildering sophistries, we have not escaped altogether a contempt for the profundity of the Christian ethic, even though it be largely unconscious.

And, all too often, men confuse the primary law underlying the ethic with a theoretic interpretation of the ethic itself, forgetful of the fact that we only know as we do, and not that we are to do as we know. This, and similar confusion, has not been absent by any means from much that has been written on this aspect and relation of the war.

As a matter of fact, there is no kind of thinking more dangerous than the emotional, just as there is no prerequisite so essential to the solution of humanity's many present problems as straight thinking. In the effort to interpret the ethic of Christ which relates to the whole principle and practice of warfare, we must beware of that kind of popular exegesis which threatens the virile character of Christianity by an introduction of unthinking sentiment as a determining factor. It must, then, be frankly confessed that there is a deplorable misconception in the public, and even the religious, mind as to the meaning and content of the ethics of non-resistance, and in much of our present effort to relate them to the war in Europe there is a danger of merely provoking an unjust contempt. For the injunction to "turn the other cheek," as commonly understood, is not one that in our present state of mental and spiritual development carries over-much attraction or appeal. It is better to face this fact plainly than to delude ourselves by the exercise of a certain sentimentality that accepts in theory what it will not endure in fact. Men have a fundamental fear, in the mass, of being unmanly, and the common misconception of what is implied in the turning of the other cheek does not advance a principle of conduct that is generally attractive to men of our day, or one that is much more popular with the other sex. Despite her tender sympathies, woman has always had a not unloving regard for masculine physical force and an abhorrence of physical cowardice; and it is only in the interests of religion itself if we insist that candor shall break through emotion and ask in plain unvarnished terms whether the ideal of non-resistance is one that ever has appealed to any day or generation. It is always a distinct

gain to view questions of religious relation free from the gloss of Sunday school sentiment, and the largely artificial atmosphere that induces a seeming change of point of view, among large numbers of men and women, on one day in every seven.

To state this frankly is not to despise the ethic of Christ; on the contrary, it is to exalt it by clearing the ground for its rescue from the mawkish sentiment with which so many have been content to surround it, to the detriment of religion and the alienation of men and women worth while. We need above all else to-day a plain restatement in the language of our times of the demands of the Christian ethic, as the first essential step to its actual practice. It either must be wise or unwise; if the former, declaring untold value in furthering human efficiency and welfare, let us practice it; if the latter, let us at least acknowledge it and abolish the humbug of a pretense that deceives nobody of lauding a course of conduct we have not the faintest intention of following. And, now, especially, is a time we need to be firmly reminded, when the man-appealing side of Christianity is threatened with further loss, that the great Founder of the ethic has no use for men and women except those of strong, dominant purpose, people who either possess, or hunger to possess, heroic qualities, and who are willing both to dare and suffer in the exercise of a splendid aggression. For this is to present instantly a point of view that at least possesses some attraction—and it is the only true view.

Of course this is to imply that the ethic of non-resistance is not of the general and wide application and character it is commonly thought to be, but subject to certain qualifications which we have, to so large an extent, forgotten or never learned. This is due in largest measure to our confused notions as to what meekness really is. We commonly visualize it as an interpretation of what is implied by turning the other cheek, as a weak man enduring a blow at the hands of a strong and inviting further castigation as unpleasant duty, whilst hoping for the intervention of a

stronger man who shall thrash the bully; or the picture is one of the weaker enduring through sheer fear, or because of some ultimate advantage to himself. Invariably it is some such image as that, or the worse one of necessity being made into a virtue by the resignation on the part of one powerless to resist. In all these the end is the conquering of the strong, either by greater physical force, or snares that eventually will make him captive to the less attractive instincts and morals of the weaker. Who among reflective minds can doubt but that this is a conception, if not a practice, that has been historically, with a certain mistaken religious aid, a factor in the affairs of men? Be that as it may, it is certain that not only Nietzschean contempt for the Christian virtues has been rooted and grounded in just such misconception and misunderstanding.

Now it cannot be too clearly insisted that any such view is nothing but the plainest, grossest parody on the Christian ethic, for that values not mere meekness, but the forces of love, courage, kindness, strength and good-will that go to its making up. Nothing is more foreign to the Christian ideal than the meekness of the Uriah Heep type, or of the effeminate ascetic preacher, who teaches true humility's exercise to be practically a standing invitation for someone to kick the exerciser. The meekness Christ preached was always associated with strength, over-mastering purpose, domination—*e.g.*, "the meek shall inherit the earth." Indeed, so far from the ethic making for the conquering of the strong by the weak, its clear purpose is the subduing of the unruly strong by the stronger, only by means which are not coercive. In other words, so far as its common daily practice is concerned—and it is a matter of common daily practice, even though it be largely unconscious—the imagery is that of one who, having power to injure or crush, wills to endure because of the love he bears for the offender, a love which ultimately is to change and win the offending heart and will. But where love is absent, the only conditioned motive for the exercise of the virtue, the matter is wholly different, and it is no part of the ethic that under

such circumstances blow or oppression shall be silently received, even though retaliation is contrary to the spirit of Christ—a statement that may appear more involved than, as we shall see, it really is.

To illustrate out of daily experience; two women are subject to violence on the part of their respective husbands. One patiently endures his tyranny without resentment or retaliation because of the great and intense love she bears him. Her love is so strong as to give her more than hope that eventually it will change her husband's disposition; and if the law seeks to interfere she begs they be let alone, or the man pardoned, because confident herself of the issue. The other woman puts up with abuse from her husband, not because of her love for him, but on account of the comfort or gain she enjoys otherwise by enduring. Now we may condemn the first woman's attitude as folly, but despite that she wins our admiration, even reverence, where the second woman provokes only our contempt. It is the motive that determines the value of the action: one is noble or base just as the motive is noble or base. To endure affliction for the sake of getting, or for a false peace, is to do far greater violence to the Christian ethic than to retaliate; self-defense becomes noble in comparison with it. The maxim, "peace at any price," bears no other relation to the ethic of Christ than sharp contradiction; love, real love, not mere vapid sentiment, alone can be the motive justifying resignation and endurance under the tyranny and assault of the oppressor. That is the principle underlying the ethic. (Without entering into purely religious discussion, which is not the purpose of this paper, it may be said in passing that this point of view throws light upon the difficulty of reconciling the injunction to the disciples, on the eve of Christ's arrest, to provide themselves with swords, with His plain, positive inculcation of the principles of true peace. At a critical time, and in a stage of their development when they were still unable to enter into the meaning of His suffering, not possessing yet the measure of love and perceptivity which

would enable them to do so, the presumption is it were better for them to draw the sword in self-defense rather than suffer a blow from any other motive than the love which was not yet theirs.)

If we apply the foregoing conclusion to the present war raging in Europe, the difficulties which grow out of the common misunderstanding of the Christian ethic are seen to disappear. It in no sense, of course, mitigates the offense of the aggressors, or justifies war as being at one with the spirit of Christ; but it declares the attitude of Belgium, for example, as being far nearer the ideal than would have been the case had she consented, in the self-interest of a false peace, to allow herself to be trampled upon and her treaties set at nought. To have done so would have been to bring herself into the same general condemnation and reproach as Luxemburg. For obviously, in both cases, the determining factor in the choice of action, so far as the Christian ethic is concerned, was lacking. Belgium did not love Germany with so great a passion that she was willing to endure so that the hearts of her oppressors might be changed and won; otherwise, it would have been demonstrated, for the first time in the history of Christianity, that a whole kingdom of the world had become a very real part of the Kingdom of God. Lacking the only motive of which the ethic takes count, she drew the sword of self-defense, where Luxemburg practically surrendered from a motive of self-interest. One may have wounded whatever possession of love there was, the other destroyed love altogether. One meant giving—giving all that she had—where the other meant getting; and giving, even of this description, approximates in some real sense to the general Christian ethic, where the other stands out in sharp opposition to it, though one drew the sword where the other sheathed it. Therefore it is idle to discuss what might have been, had Belgium turned the other cheek, when the only justifying motive for such an action was clearly wanting. Belgium could have acted in no other way than she has acted, under circumstances which make her action right in the *light* of

the ethic, as distinct from the exemplification of it, and right in the point of view of all healthy thinking men—a reconciliation which is most desirable. Not, of course, that it is implied that Belgium under *any* circumstances could not have fulfilled the ethic itself, but that under present circumstances, when the corporate spiritual possession of sufficient love was lacking, she took a course which was justified in the light of the ethic, even though the drawing of the sword was disloyal to the spirit of Christ.

We shall only rid ourselves of those harmful artificialities and meaningless affectations which abound to the detriment of modern religion, as we seek to free ourselves from the confusion that grows out of thoughtlessness, aided by lack of frankness. Therefore, it needs to be pointed out and clearly grasped that the Christian ethic is concerned not directly with the kingdoms of the world, but with that Kingdom in the world, yet not of the world—a totally different matter, to which we are not alive as we should be. We are rather stupidly looking for effects apart from their causes when we confuse the two. It is quite beside the point to prate about the violence Christian nations are doing to the laws of Christian conduct, just because certain nations are content to be labelled as what they manifestly are not—Christian. The ethics of the Sermon on the Mount were promulgated for those who became, or were to become, citizens of a very real Kingdom, but one not of this world; a course of conduct was marked out for *them*, not for those who remained without, violating, in some shape or form, almost every vestige of its spirit, inclined only to pause where the shedding of blood was concerned. And in the confusion and heart-breaking disappointment that results to-day, with the accompanying fear, so generally expressed, that perhaps after all Christianity has failed when Christian nations thus fly at each other's throats, we are simply reaping what we have sown in our amazing willingness to accept national expressions of religion as being one with the religion of Christ. If the war means only this one thing to the religious world, viz.:

that it brings out in lasting emphasis that Christendom is in many things at opposite poles to Christ, and in most at variance with the principles of His religion, how great a boon will have been done to the cause of vital Christianity! For we have all too long almost unpardonably blundered in our readiness to accept the official acts of governments, nominally Christian, as being in line, if not one with, the principles of Christ's Christianity. It is only as we rid ourselves of emotionalism in thinking that we realize the spirit of the world is still the spirit of get, where the spirit of the Kingdom not of the world is ever that of give. We cannot reconcile these just because it looks or feels nice and appeals to an unthinking sentiment: they are irreconcilable and must war, one with the other, until one proves the conqueror and subdues the other.

This is made clear in the saying to Pilate: "My Kingdom is not of this world, else would My servants fight." That is to say, were His Kingdom of the world, fighting would be the only natural course to pursue when violence was done to its Ruler; there would be no alternative; an implication that so long as the kingdoms of the world remain really unabsorbed in His, wars must and shall continue. There is nothing more than hope to justify the propaganda of religious bodies that this shall be "the last war"; nor are we encouraged to believe that the preaching of such a tenet will seriously influence men and nations as they are to-day when we reflect that our present despondency and grief is, not so much because of the sin of the fighting spirit, but chiefly because of the loss of friends and property—a totally different thing from that Christian mourning which has the promise of being comforted. No, the kingdoms of the world will continue to fight until the fighting spirit is subdued in the individual. Wars may be fewer, partly as the indirect result of the influence that comes from all that is best in the religious sphere, but chiefly because war costs more than peace. It is only the "servants" who will not fight, because they share, or hunger to share, the spirit of the Ruler of the Kingdom not of this world—the realiza-

tion of which should open up wide avenues for necessary action on the part of religious forces for increasing their numbers. Meanwhile, both will act naturally: the one governed by the ethic will be possessed with that love which burns up hatred; the other, without the Kingdom, will draw and perish by the sword.

This is not to slight the high ideals of nations or men who profess no religion, but simply a recognition—sorely needed generally—that there is an expression of the Divine Will in the human government of nations as distinct from the fuller and complete revelation in the Kingdom of God; and an operation of that Will, even though the worldly power be unconscious of it. Each has its place; we must not confuse the two. It is made abundantly plain that the power of Pilate to pass judgment was “given from above,” though the judgment itself was his own and its consequences to be met by himself. So, now as then, there is an operation of God in the nations of the world as distinct from the sphere of religion; the two spheres are not the same; each has its own ethic and one will grow ultimately—keeps growing gradually—to a realization of the values of what is revealed as the starting point of the other. People ought not to fight, but it is manifest they will continue to fight until the fighting spirit is conquered by the spirit of Christ, and that will be not by an importation of His spirit into the world, but by the absorption of the world into His spirit. Clearly this is something that has no immediate promise of realization.

It is altogether beside the mark, then, to rave about the violation of the Christian ethic in modern warfare of nations, seeing that the ethic only applies where it is voluntarily accepted, and its judgment only where there has been light in which it might have been accepted. As a matter of fact, those nations, which are merely Christian by courtesy of speech, act naturally in fighting, just as the true servant of Christ in abstaining from fighting acts naturally also. With both it is “first that which is natural; and afterward that which is spiritual”—one is the only

foundation of the other. We cannot build the structure until the foundations are properly understood and laid and it is the failure to grasp this simple but profound truth which is so largely accountable for the anæmic quality of modern religion—our spirituality is to so great an extent unnatural. As things are, the onus of responsibility for fighting, in relation to God, rests upon the individual who, claiming to be Christian, rejects deliberately the ethic.

And this brings us face to face with the unpleasant fact of the tremendous share of responsibility that rests upon corporate religion for the present bloodshed. So far from standing afar off, and looking on with an air of lofty outraged righteousness, corporate Christianity should be on its knees at the tribunal of penitence as it beholds its own sons in the thick of the carnage. This is the really outstanding *shameful* feature of the war, that the Christianity preached to the children has been of such a worldly, colorless, compromised nature as not even to suggest a check when the fighting spirit challenged. The responsibility for that rests on other shoulders than those of the men at the front, adorned with Christian crosses, fighting bravely. Thinking people are resenting the Pharisaism of a religious press that calmly assumes this war has broken a sort of peace of Paradise that had prevailed; or that in righteous indignation (to quote from a New York publication) declares the whole duty of the Church to be that she "can show that war means the Sermon on the Mount stamped under foot and, in the place of spiritual forces, brute forces are made the law of life." They feel inclined to call attention to the fact that the only kind of spiritual forces corporate religion seemed able to bring men into contact with, were of a rather worthless kind when they surrendered so easily to those of the brute. And, apart from this, one is impelled to enquire the difference between the Sermon on the Mount stamped under bloody feet and those delicately shod with religious respectability in times of peace? Since when, in our times, has corporate religion burned with zeal to exemplify in its own life the precepts of the Sermon on

the Mount? It is just the expression of such mawkish sentiment as this which declares the appalling fear that, in the Divine accounting of responsibility, the ax once more must be laid at the root of the tree!

If we are to profit by the lessons of this fearful bloodshed, clearly we must begin by realizing that war simply gives startling emphasis to conditions of life and action that form the norm of so-called Christian countries in times of peace. We war to get because we live to get; we oppress by force of arms because we oppress by the selfishness and self-interest of our social and economic life; we kill with shot and shell in war because we kill by callousness and lovelessness, treachery and self-seeking in times of peace. What advantageth it for a man to refuse to go abroad to fight so that he remain at home to oppress or disregard the suffering of his brothers? Where is the glory of knitting socks in the name of Christ for those who fight abroad, whilst content to behold our brethren at home unshod and unclothed? Or to send food to fighting armies abroad whilst untouched by the sight, grown familiar, of hungering armies of unemployed at home? Trampling the Sermon on the Mount underfoot! Since when has the corporate Christian conscience—as distinct from the individual—done anything else with it at home in our times? These are some of the questions religious bodies must ask themselves and bravely face before they presume to reproach. Religious hands, as symbols of religious hearts, must be clean before preaching is attempted. For, compared with much in our smug life at home enjoying religious sanction and patronage, with its empty churches and homeless men, the war—with its heroism, its self-denial, its uncompromising spirit of giving, its tender glimpses of strong men's pity, endurance and magnanimity, their respect and admiration even for the bravery of their enemies—the war, we dare to say, stands out in splendid, glorious relief. With all its manifest contradictions to the spirit of Christ, who among truly reflective or religious minds shall say that it fails on the whole, in what it calls forth, to approximate

more closely to the ideal than the sanctified self-satisfaction of that type of the religious conscience that simply lives to get? There are worse things than war—things more repugnant to God and right-thinking men—and it is only as we break away from our false emotional thinking that we shall begin to be in a position to enter into the heritage of opportunity the close of the war will offer to Christianity.

It is idle for us to talk about the Christian ethic until we seek to understand by living it, and to realize that it sheds its rays abroad so that those not knowing the ethic are seen in its light, living and acting at the opposite pole to the Pharisaic mind of all time, with the Kingdom of God come very nigh unto them. This is a day not so much for the repentance of nations as for the religious organism to weep in penitence, because it has been content to preach what it failed to practice; not a time to find fault on the score of outraged Christian ethics, but to learn and practice obedience to the one that is through and over all—viz.: “he that loseth his life, for My sake, shall find it.” No one will accuse the mammon-dependent organized Christianity of to-day, with its energies exhausted in its mad selfish struggle to maintain itself, of even the possession in part of that spirit which dares to make the venture! It is only as the Church generally enters into the paradox that her vision will become clarified and she made able to speak; for the principle underlying the laws of Christian conduct is that we only know as we *do*. Perhaps this is the lesson the war is to teach the spiritual army that, walking by sight rather than faith, reverses the order and essays to do only as she knows?

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